

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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SUBJECT: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. SUMMARY. PRESIDENT LOPEZ INAUGURATED THE 1976-77 CONGRESS ON JULY 20. HIS BUDGET PROPOSAL WHICH WAS SUBMITTED TO THE CONGRESS ON JULY 21 PROJECTS A THREE BILLIONPESO DEFICIT AND EXCLUDES PROVISIONS FOR THE CONTROVERSIAL PARLIAMENTARY AUXILIARY FUNDS. SEVERAL BOMBING OCCURRED IN BOGOTA, WHILE DEMONSTRATIONS AGAINST BUS FARE INCREASES CONTINUED. GUERRILLA FORCES ALSO REMAINED ACTIVE. THE LEADERS OF VENEZUELA, PANAMA AND COLOMBIA WERE SCHEDULED TO MEET FOR THE FOURTH TIME JULY 23. END SUMMARY.

2. PRESIDENT LOPEZ INAUGURATES THE 1976-77 CONGRESS. PRESIDENT LOPEZ DEVOTED THE MAJOR PART OF HIS THREE-HOUR SPEECH INAUGURATING THE 1976-77 CONGRESS JULY 20 TO HIS PROPOSAL FOR A LIMITED CONSTITUTIONAL ASSEMBLY (BOGOTA 7364). EARLY SOUNDINGS AMONG CONGRESSMEN REVEALED WIDESPREAD SYMPATHY FOR PASSING THE NECESSARY CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT, WHICH WILL REQUIRE APPROVAL IN TWO CONSECUTIVE SESSIONS.

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HOWEVER, SEVERAL MEMBERS OF THE CHAMBER OF REPRESENTATIVES

TOLD THE EMBASSY THAT THE INITIATIVE MAY RUN INTO TROUBLE NEXT YEAR AS PRESIDENT LOPEZ' TERM OF OFFICE APPROACHES ITS END AND HIS INFLUENCE IN THE CONGRESS CORRESPONDINGLY DECREASES. THE PRESIDENT'S BUDGET MESSAGE (SEE BELOW) DELIVERED JULY 21 TO THE CONGRESS DID NOT INCLUDE A PROVISION FOR PARLIAMENTARY AUXILIARY FUNDS (PORK BARREL). SOME CONGRESSMEN TOLD US THAT THE CURRENT PRESS PUBLICITY OF SCANDALS INVOLVING THE USE OF THESE FUNDS, MAY BE RELATED TO ADMINISTRATION EFFORTS TO FORCE THE CONGRESS TO APPROVE THE BUDGET AS PRESENTED. THEY OPINED THAT WHEN THE BUDGET IS FINALL APPROVED IN LATE NOVEMBER, IT WOULD INCLUDE THE INFAMOUS FUNDS.

3. 1977 BUDGET PRESENTED TO CONGRESS. THE 1977 BUDGET SUBMITTED TO CONGRESS THIS WEEK, PROJECTS A THREE BILLION PESO DEFICIT OF WHICH 2.4 BILLION WILL BE FINANCED EXTERNALLY. TOTAL EXPENDITURES IN 1977 WILL BE 61.8 BILLION PESOS, AN INCREASE OF 20 PERCENT OVER THE 1976 BUDGET. INVESTMENT EXPENDITURES WILL INCREASE 31 PERCENT AND OPERATIONS BY ONLY 16.2 PERCENT. WITH INFLATION AROUND 13-15 PERCENT IN 1977 THE OPERATIONS BUDGET INCREASE IS TIGHT. THE DIRECTOR FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE TAKING OFFICE, AND BELIEVES THAT IT WILL AT LAST BE A USEFUL TOOL TO HELP ACHIEVE ADMINISTRATION OBJECTIVES. IT IS NOT CLEAR, HOWEVER, WHY THE GOVERNMENT PLANS TO INCREASE EXTERNAL BORROWING AND REDUCE INTERNAL BORROWING IN A YEAR IN WHICH COFFEE PRICES ARE EXPECTED TO REMAIN STRONG.

4. BOMBINGS. TWO SUCCESSFUL BOMBINGS AND AN ABORTIVE ONE OCCURRED IN BGOTA JULY 17. THE AIR PANAMA OFFICES WERE BADLY DAMAGED, ALLEGEDLY BY ANTI-CASTROITES PROTESTING THAT COMPANY'S AIR SERVICE TO CUBA. UNKNOWN PERSONS BOMBED A CAR WHICH HAD BELONGED TO THE FORMER CHILEAN AMBASSADOR TO COLOMBIA. FINALLY, A BOMB WAS DISCOVERED AND DISARMED IN THE OFFICES OF THE BURROUGHS CORPORATION.

5. DEMONSTRATIONS. DEMONSTRATIONS AGAINST THE RECENT INCREASE IN BUS FARES CONTINUED THROUGHT THE COUNTRY. THE MOST SERIOUS INCIDENT OCCURRED IN CALI JULY 22, WHEN INDIVIDUALS CLAIMING TO BE MEMBERS OF THE EXTREMIST TERRORIST LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ORGANIZATION, M-19, MACHINE GUNNED SEVERAL EMPTY PARKED BUSES. MEANWHILE, THE US-COLOMBIAN BI-NATIONAL CENTER IN BUCARAMANGA WAS STONED FOR THE SECOND TIME IN THE LAST TWO WEEKS. (BOGOTA 7365).

6. GUERRILLA ACTIVITY. THE MOSCOW LINE COMMUNIST GUERRILLA FORCE, FARC, REPORTEDLY BRIEFLY OCCUPIED AND LOOTED TWO REMOTE VILLAGES ON JULY 16 AND 17. THERE WERE NO CASUALTIES

REPORTED.

7. PRESIDENTS LOPEZ AND PEREZ AND GENERAL TORRIJOS MEET AGAIN. THE LEADRS OF VENEZUELA, PANAMA AND COLOMBIA AND THEIR ADVISERS WERE SCHEDULED TO MEET JULY 23 ON A BOAT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ARAUCA RIVER. THIS IS THE FOURTH JOINT MEETING. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, THE LEADERS ARE EXPECTED TO REVIEW THE BY NOW COMMON THEMES OF UNDOCUMENTED ALIENS, BORDER DELIMITATION PROBLEMS, AND THE NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN PANAMA AND THE UNITED STATES OVER THE FUTURE OF THE PANAMA CANAL.
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